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## IMPRESSIONS\*

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After having read the very able and interesting article entitled, "Taking Inventory," which appeared in the *QUARTERLY* about a year ago, it occurs to the writer that possibly some further attention may be devoted to a consideration of an unfortunate condition which at present exists within the Society.

It appears that in order to obtain data relative to the status of Sigma Xi, and of more or less general interest, the former Recording Secretary of the Cornell Chapter sent a circular letter to all the chapter secretaries, in which letter, among other questions were the following: "What means, if any, are being taken in your chapter to keep in touch with your nonresident members, particularly those who have no opportunity to affiliate with other chapters? Has your chapter ever considered the question?"

By far the majority of the replies indicated that no means at all were being taken to get into contact with the alumni membership, in fact, that the question had never been considered. Referring to the statistics as given in this article, one finds that some five thousand alumni, constituting approximately eighty three per cent of the total alumni membership, are beyond any direct influence of the Society. It is reasonable to believe that this entire number never receives any official notices whatsoever from their respective chapters. And yet, notwithstanding the fact, most of these members are engaged in research in the pure and applied domains of science either in educational institutions, or in the larger commercial enterprises.

No immediate statistics are available, but nevertheless it seems plausible to assert that ninety per cent of the total alumni membership consists of those who have been elected to active membership as seniors in the last year of undergraduate work, and thereafter become alumni members upon severing connection with their respective institutions. In the majority of chapters, the date of election of new members is put as late in the collegiate year as practicable; not a few chapters arranging the election some time after the first of May. This procedure undoubtedly does have its advantage in that it permits a reasonable time in which each prospective candidate may establish his promise of ability or else

\*F. K. Richtmyer, *SIGMA XI QUARTERLY*, December, 1914, pp. 91-104.

undertake to a fair degree of completion some problem of research which may be justly considered as such. The result is that the newly elected seniors, who on the whole generally constitute between forty-five and fifty per cent of the elected members, are initiated into the Society so late in the year, that opportunity is available to attend but a single meeting. Commencement follows soon after, and as a result, the larger percentage of these neophytes leave for callings where they are generally never discovered by the Society. Indeed an altogether too short time exists before the college graduation in which a senior may have opportunity to become acquainted with the Society, its history, importance, and ideals. It has come to the writer's attention that some alumni have even forgotten they were ever initiated! And yet they belong to a class which aggregates over sixty per cent of the total membership, and with which the Society has never come into real affiliation. It seems the least that may be done is to provide as many of our alumni as possible with copies of the *QUARTERLY*, and further, that some arrangement be developed whereby each chapter comes into contact with, and develops a deeper realization of the value of its alumni membership. Unless some such measures be undertaken, the question may arise as to what benefit accrues to the Society, or to the individual concerned by virtue of this class of alumni membership.

Advantage is also taken of the opportunity at this time to mention another matter which has been suggested by one of the questions in the circular letter referred to above—namely, the extent to which social possibilities are emphasized in the chapters.

There is a very definite reason for the existence of Sigma Xi. Just as the Founders of the Society distinctly saw the necessity and desirability of its existence, so should the purpose at present ever be to proceed, insofar as this is possible, towards an ever growing realization of their ideals. By reference to the constitution, we find that one of the objects of Sigma Xi is to establish fraternal relations among those engaged in scientific research. Indeed the Founders appreciated the importance of the promotion of good-fellowship and a fraternal spirit, and for this reason, such an object should receive the united and unanimous support of the Society. The complete exemplification of the ideals and objects of Sigma Xi means more than the advancement of science by research—it also emphasizes that mutual development and pleasure which result

from social contact with other investigators. That the idea is not working out as satisfactorily as may be desired is the suspicion of many, and is also indicated to a greater or less degree by the nature of the chapter replies to the above question given in the article cited.

Most men who are devoting their life work to the development of science are doing thus because they so desire. They are exerting the best efforts in their particular specialties purely through a personal love of the work, or perhaps ambition. Thus the progress one may accomplish in a chosen field is encouraged not so much by any impetus he may receive from membership in a scientific society, as it is by his own individual attitude. To associate with such men, to acquire an appreciation of their illuminating minds and work, in short to understand them, is indeed a privilege and it is this advantage which Sigma Xi may offer without limit. To those who make use of such opportunities, the rewards are beyond mention. There is also produced that desirable and broadening influence whereby the narrowness developed by excessive and intensive specialization is counteracted.

Theoretically no group of men is as free from prejudice and ready to admit the points of view of others as scientific investigators. Yet it is familiar to all how simple a matter it is, especially among the younger men, to believe that one's own field is the only one worthy of concentrated attention, one's own department the most important one in the institution. However, with the development of the true ideals of Sigma Xi, such an attitude will never entertain serious consideration.

Progress in all branches of scientific work resolves itself finally into the accomplishments of the individual worker, who is assumed to put all his energy into the task purely as a personal matter; nevertheless he is not supposed to let himself develop too narrowly. A scientist possesses primarily powers of individual thought, and as such is capable of broad and extensive development. Only too often are instances brought into evidence where the engineers, for example, dealing with science in its practical aspects are known to scoff at the investigators who are delving into the unknown domains of pure science. Coöperation and a practical solution of the problem such as Sigma Xi could afford, would do much to reconcile the general differences of opinion; and the acute and aggressive criticism, by one class of another, would become unknown.

As was mentioned previously, a thorough understanding and appreciation of the line of thought another is following, is conducive to a higher and more glorious sphere of usefulness. A glance at the leaders of our various realms of endeavors will fairly always yield the result that not least among the necessary qualifications is personality. In order to be able to influence others, to impress one's thoughts and ideas upon a greater and larger number of the community, just so much the more must the individual personality be important. If one have nothing in common with his associates, no matter how intensive his intellect, even though his light burn with the brilliancy of a thousand candle-power, it will be only as through a dense mist. To strive continually and only for the advancement of science may perhaps realize a noble ideal, but the individual as a human being will be sacrificed, and the fulfillment of a complete and full life will never be realized. No instructor for example, can present a message in the classroom unless he has a true appreciation of those whom he seeks to instruct. This true appreciation can be gathered only by personal contact.

Social intercourse seems to be a desirable asset in any professional life if one would reap the maximum benefits. To be sure, more emphasis may have been placed upon the above condition of circumstances than may be warranted by a true statement of the facts as they exist within the Society. However, when we realize that one of our chapters has no social activities whatsoever, and that in another, meetings are strictly departmental in character, it would appear perhaps that these two chapters are overlooking one of the essential objects for which Sigma Xi was founded.

### THE CHICAGO CHAPTER

The Chicago Chapter held three regular quarterly meetings during the year 1914-15, and tried the policy of starting the evening's festivities in each case with a subsidized dinner at the Quadrangle Club. Since the idea of getting something for nothing seems to appeal as strongly to people of scientific attainments as to the non-scientific, this policy proved to be a distinct success. After dinner a short business meeting was held, at which the new members, previously elected by the electoral board, were initiated and such business as came before the chapter, transacted. This was followed by the formal address of the evening.

At the autumn Quarter meeting on December 5, 1914, Dr. Arthur Gordon Webster, of Clark University, spoke most fascinatingly upon